

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SY-05

SCCT-01 OPIC-03 TRSE-00 IO-10 USSS-00 /076 W

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R 021225Z APR 75

FM AMCONSUL BILBAO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 466

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY PARIS UNN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, SP, BE

SUBJ: EASTER WEEK-END IN BASQUE COUNTRY

REF: BILBAO 038

1. SUMMARY: DURING THE EASTER HOLIDAYS, THE BASQUE COUNTRY WAS THE SCENE OF NUMEROUS BOMBINGS, AND ETA ASSASSINATION OF A POLICE INSPECTOR IN SAN SEBASTIAN AND THE ANNUAL BASQUE REUNION(ALBERRI EGUNA) IN GUERNICA. TWO BELGIAN MP'S WERE ARRESTED AND DEPORTED AFTER GOING TO GUERNICA FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEMONSTRATING THE CONTINUED LACK OF FREE SPEECH IN SPAIN. END SUMMARY.

2. THE EASTER WEEK-END BEGAN WITH A BANG ON MAR 27 WITH THE EXPLOSION OF FOUR BOMBS AT SEVERAL COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE HEART OF THE TRADITIONAL BASQUE TOWN OF GUERNICA, IN WHICH THE ANNUAL BASQUE NATIONALIST REUNION WAS TO BE HELD ON EASTER SUNDAY. THE EARLY MORNING BLASTS CAUSED DAMAGES ESTIMATED AT 5.5 MILLION PESETAS BUT NO DEATHS OR INJURIES.

3. THE GUERNICA BOMBINGS (AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF OTHERS AT THE SAME TIME) WERE FOLLOWED ON MARCH 29 BY THE MACHINEGUN

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ASSASSINATION OF A SAN SEBASTIAN POLICE INSPECTOR WHO,

(ACCORDING TO A BILBAO POLICE AGENT) WORKED IN THE INVESTIGATION SECRET SERVICE. ETA CLAIMED CREDIT FOR THE SHOOTING IN AN ANNOUNCEMENT ISSUED IN BORDEAUX, FRANCE.

4. GUERNICA WAS ALSO THE SCENE OF THE ANNUAL BASQUE PILGRIMAGE ON "ABERRI EGUNA" (DAY OF THE FATHERLAND) ON EASTER SUNDAY. ARMED POLICE SET-UP CONTROL INSPECTION POINTS ON ALL ROADS LEADING INTO GUERNICA AND AT LEAST THREE BUSES AND A DOZEN OR SO LAND ROVERS CROWDED WITH POLICE WERE STATIONED INSIDE THE TOWN. POLICE TURNED BACK SOME CARS, SEIZED A NUMBER OF IDENTITY DOCUMENTS AND DETAINED SOME 40 VISITORS INCLUDING SOME WHO ARRIVED BY TRAIN.

5. THE ONLY REAL INCIDENT DURING "ABERRI EGUNA" INVOLVED TWO BELGIAN MP'S OF THE FLEMISH FEDERAL UNION PARTY, IDENTIFIED IN THE PRESS AS WALTER LUYTEN AND WILLYS KUIJPERS. UPON COMING OUT OF A CHURCH THEY SHOUTED THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH THE BASQUE NATIONALISTS AND UNFURLED A LARGE WHITE CLOTH ON WHICH WERE PAINTED BASQUE SEPARATIST SLOGANS AND TWO FLAGS REPRESENTING THE BASQUE COUNTRY AND EUROPE. THEY WERE ARRESTED BY POLICE ALONG WITH AN AMERICAN FREE LANCE WRITER (SEE BILBAO 038). THE MP'S WERE SUBSEQUENTLY DEPORTED TO FRANCE. THEY INDICATED THAT THIS DEMONSTRATION OF THE LACK OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN SPAIN WOULD ENABLE THEM TO PROVIDE VALID OPPOSITION TO ANY NEW EFFORTS BY SPAIN TO JOIN EUROPEAN ENTITIES SUCH AS EEC AND NOTO.

6. COMMENT: DURING AND AFTER A VISIT TO GUERNICA, I TALKED TO SOME BASQUE NATIONALISTS WHO HAD GONE TO GUERNICA, SOME OF WHOM CLAIMED TO HAVE TALKED TO ETA MEMBERS ABOUT RECENT EVENTS. THEY ALL STATED THAT THE BOMBED ESTABLISHMENTS BELONGED TO POLICE INFORMERS AND THAT THE ASSASSINATED POLICEMAN HAD BEEN GUILTY OF TORTURING POLITICAL PRISONERS. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE BOMBINGS AND ASSASSINATION PROVOKED TIGHTER POLICE CONTROLS AND LED TO RUMORS OF POSSIBLE VIOLENT POLICE REACTION TO ANY POSSIBLE INCIDENT ON "ABERRI EGUNA" (GOVT HAS ANNOUNCED 68 "ABERRI EGUNA"-CONNECTED ARRESTS). THIS CLIMATE OF FEAR CAUSED MANY TO STAY AWAY FROM GUERNICA. THE MANY POLICE IN EVIDENCE, PICTURES OF ALLEGED ETA VICTIMS PLASTERED ON BUILDINGS, OTHER GOVERNMENT ANTI- "ABERRI EGUNA" PAMPHLETS SCATTERED ABOUT THE STREETS, AND THE BRIEF INCIDENT INVOLVING THE BELGIAN MP'S, CONSTITUTED THE ONLY EVIDENCE THAT THIS WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOT JUST AN ORDINARY EASTER SUNDAY.

4. EMBASSY COMMENT: THESE EVENTS HAVE ONCE AGAIN CHARGED BASQUE POLITICAL CLIMATE. ETA'S OBJECTIVES IN ASSASSINATION APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN PROVOKE WIDESPREAD RETALIATORY ACTIONS BY GOVT, WHICH REPRESSION WOULD PLAY INTO ETA HANDS, AND TO ALSO SPOIL GUERNICA COMMEMORATIONS OF MODERATE AND DEMOCRATIC-ORIENTED PNV BASQUE NATIONALIST PARTY.

(IN LAST YEAR'S "ABERRI EGUNA", PNV ACHIEVED PROPAGANDA SUCCESS
BY CLANDESTINELY BRINGING BASQUE PRESIDENT-IN-EXILE LEIZAOLA FROM
FRANCE TO GUERNICA.)
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: BOMBING, ASSASSINATION, TERRORISTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BILBAO00039
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750114-0184
From: BILBAO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750491/aaaadeso.tel
Line Count: 119
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BILBAO 038
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 17 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <17 APR 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <21 MAY 2003 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EASTER WEEK-END IN BASQUE COUNTRY
TAGS: PINS, SP, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006